



## **Stakeholder Interview Summary Report**

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The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is interested in finding a solution to the current safety and traffic congestion issues on SR-28. While the problem area that prompted the study is SR-28 between the Odabashian Bridge to the north and the Ninth Street intersection to the south, the area east of the Columbia River between Rock Island Dam and Rocky Reach Dam is being examined in order to find a solution that reflects community interests and values. In an effort to find a widely supported solution, WSDOT is reaching out to key stakeholders who represent constituencies that will be affected by the project. Fifteen key stakeholders were selected from lists of interested parties. Those interviewed include citizens, community activists, business leaders, orchardists, transportation providers and emergency services agencies.

Phone interviews were conducted from March 16 to April 6, 2001. Some stakeholders chose to e-mail their responses. All interviewees are aware of the highly charged feelings surrounding the project and know that brokering a solution will be challenging. However, they share the sentiment that a solution needs to be decided upon in order to alleviate traffic pressure and provide guidance for future development. Many commented on the critical need for the process to be neutral and perceive public involvement efforts to date as impartial.

The group identified three major issues facing East Wenatchee:

- ♦ Economic Development
- ♦ Traffic Congestion
- ♦ Growth Management

Suggested improvements to SR-28 included:

- ♦ Widen SR-28
- ♦ Create a new highway segment along the river or on the bench
- ♦ Address bottlenecks at bridges (widening existing bridges or building new bridges)

Following are summaries of responses to questions asked during the interviews.

## 1. What are the biggest issues and opportunities facing East Wenatchee?

Five interviewees see economic development as a key opportunity for East Wenatchee. Several respondents noted the decrease in agricultural commodity prices and its effects on related industries as key issues. This affects the community in several ways. Economic diversification is perceived as vital in order to offer current residents and their families a viable way of making a living. Interviewees perceived a “brain drain” in which the area’s most capable young people are forced or lured away by more stable and lucrative job opportunities found elsewhere. They foresee a SR-28 solution alleviating this situation, as it would improve freight mobility, which would reduce agriculture costs, while also attracting manufacturing to the area. Interviewees also spoke of increased recreational opportunities as a new economic engine; an opportunity many feel cannot be realized as long as WSDOT holds onto the right-of-way it currently owns along the riverfront.

*There are limited opportunities for families to keep their kids in the area because the children seek better economic opportunities elsewhere. Agriculture prices are too low. Long term we’re going to have to diversify from our agricultural economy.*

*We’ll need new economic development opportunities. We think it will mean developing recreation opportunities, especially along the river. None of that can happen as long as WSDOT controls the property by the river.*

Three interviewees identified traffic congestion as a major issue. They mentioned its impacts throughout the valley.

*Transportation needs have been growing. We have the largest area without 3-point access.*

Four identified growth management as a major issue. All recognized that population growth was pushing existing systems beyond the capacity they were designed to handle. The majority of the group is aware that if decisions are not made soon, then options to control growth will be severely limited.

*If we don’t make decisions now, we’ll lose the chance to influence future development.*

*We need to prepare for new chapters of communities.*

## 2. What are your most important concerns regarding East Wenatchee?

Similar to responses to question one, interviewees cited traffic congestion, growth management, and economic development as concerns facing East Wenatchee. Traffic congestion is seen as negatively impacting East Wenatchee from both economic and quality of life perspectives:

*Traffic has gotten bad enough that some orchardists may choose to process their products elsewhere. The tight traffic also affects the overall economy. As a transit operator, it greatly affects our system. We need to address it now before it gets much worse.*

*People want to access the commercial areas and their homes in a timely, safe manner.*

Two interviewees cited growth management as an important concern, specifically relating to recent annexation and incorporation:

*We have a large revenue base from our industrial area, as we annex more territory it tends to be residential. In essence our coffers are getting a little poorer.*

*Some people are concerned as the city grows by incorporation. I've noticed that the cash strapped county does all the development in these projects and then turns them over to the city, which gets the benefits but doesn't pay for them. I don't think that's right. I think we should consider an Impact fee for future development.*

Economic development is a major concern for many in the group. Many feel that economic diversification is vital for future prosperity. "Brain drain" was again cited as a concern, stating that occurring because the economy does not offer enough options for the younger generations. Another interviewee stated that maintaining quality of life is important so that high-tech businesses and their employees would choose to locate in the area. Improving recreational opportunities was a common theme for three of the stakeholders, whether viewed as part of the new regional economy or as important for quality of life.

*We also need to improve our recreational opportunities, investing in the river, ski area etc.*

*We also need to expand the recreational opportunities in the area. For example, we don't have any marinas.*

### **3. Does the East Wenatchee area have any issues or opportunities associated with SR -28? Are there seasonal issues associated with SR-28?**

All the interviewees mentioned traffic as an issue associated with SR-28. Five said that traffic was bad regardless of the season. The stakeholders defined seasonal in different ways. Seven mentioned harvest time, while others brought up summer tourist traffic, winter conditions and school-related traffic peaks as other "seasons" to consider. Several respondents discussed safety issues associated with the existing facility. School busses/bus stops on SR-28 were mentioned frequently as causing much of the congestion in the peak time as well as causing safety concerns for the school children.

**4. Do you have any personal experience with transportation problems in East Wenatchee or with SR-28?**

All reported experiencing transportation problems. Slower commute times lead the list, but there are several other impacts of increased traffic. One stakeholder who lives on Cascade Avenue has noticed an increasing amount of traffic on his street, which is being used as an alternate route by travelers trying to avoid SR-28. Another interviewee reported an increase in traffic at night as commercial truckers seek to avoid daytime driving. Several interviewees mentioned school buses as a major impediment to a smooth drive.

**5. What improvements would you suggest for SR-28?**

None of the stakeholders interviewed objected to the widening of SR-28. Those who explicitly recommended widening the road had ideas that ranged from adding sidewalks at a minimum to widening it to 5 lanes. In addition others suggested better lighting, building an overpass at 9<sup>th</sup> Street, construction of elevated lanes over the existing roadway or running a fixed or floating road down the river. Limiting access to SR-28 also received widespread support.

Other suggested improvements to congestion in the corridor included construction of a new route altogether. Two potential alignments were mentioned. Five of the stakeholders spoke in favor of a bench route, with two stakeholders holding the opinion that a bench route is not feasible.

Four stakeholders cited the costs already incurred as a major reason to move forward with a river route.

**6. Are you familiar with earlier concepts for SR-28? If so, what are your opinions of them?**

Overall the group did not have much recall about earlier concepts for SR-28, with the exception of the river route. Respondents seemed to either think the river route should have already been built and that a few in the community brought that option to a halt with the past lawsuit, or that the river route should not even be considered due to the river as a community resource.

**7. Are you interested in attending a stakeholder workshop?**

Ten stakeholders said they would like to participate, two said they would not and two said they were possibly interested depending on the date and time.

**8. Can you suggest other individuals we should contact or include in a stakeholder workshop?**

The stakeholders had many suggestions. They included general suggestions like, port and county commissioners, interagency team members, city and county officials and the state highway patrol.